FIGHTING FIT FARMER BUCKS THE TREND

AT BAKER 70.3 GEELONG

Farmers have been the backbone of Australia for centuries with a well earned reputation as some of the most resilient and hard working people. Life on the land is still a tough, often precarious, 24/7 occupation and while the mechanisation of the rural landscape has brought advantages, there have also been some health and wellbeing disadvantages.

So much so that there is now a rural health initiative called “Fat Farmers” that works with farmers and rural community members to encourage farmers to train together, form support networks and ultimately, improve physical and mental health outcomes. With 3,000 acres of cropping and livestock to care for South Australia’s Gavin Lutze has a good understanding of how to combine life on the land with life as an IRONMAN, but it wasn’t always the case.

“Farming has changed a lot over the years and it now a seven day a week job but it is more sitting and technical work than it used to be in my father’s generation. They were lumping wheat bags and cutting fence posts by hand and digging post holes by hand. Now it is all mechanical now but you still do get days were you need to be physically fit with sheep work or fencing and if you have been sitting on a tractor doing nothing that is when injuries happen.”

“I think in the country there is a culture where people think they are more active than they are and probably drink a bit too much and don’t eat well and eat at odd hours. The lifestyle is not as healthy as it used to be. Farming on its own doesn’t keep you fit anymore and in rural areas it is harder to join gyms and be active, so you have to do something extra.”

“I live in a small country town where once you finished playing football in your thirties, there is really not much of a selection of sports to keep you fit. I have become involved with a group in South Australia that has been trying to get farmers fit and more active.”

“I mostly played football, right up to my early thirties and used to shear sheep a bit but once I stop that I started a family got busy with the business and between 30-40 I put on a bit of weight and was looking for something to stay fit. My story is that I started riding bikes and somehow ended up doing triathlon and progressed to IRONMAN.”

“I went to a triathlon one day and saw all these 50 year olds running around. I didn’t know that 50 year olds were competing in such events. It really opened my eyes and I set my mind to participating. I started doing a few and was always coming last and then I got onto a
coach in Adelaide who is associated with the Lakers Triathlon Club and I trained with them a bit and learned how to swim and ride and run a bit. Nowadays if I have a good day I finish in the middle of the pack, never at the front but I thoroughly enjoy it."

Gavin said the benefits of exercise are numerous but some farmers struggle with the idea of taking time for themselves, so that they can become more productive at work.

"I grew up on the 3,000 acre property we are still on and I run that on my own. I am in my late fifties so it is pretty important to stay healthy to do my work. Being a farmer is a bit unrelating because we live on the farm where were we work and there are a lot of things out of our control and especially in a country town where you are all farmers. When you go out to socialise you tend to talk farming and if it is a crook season you talk about how crook it is. Even socialising is not an escape from the day job."

"I find that training for triathlon, running and riding helps me switch off and sleep and eat really well. You can’t always leave the farm to have a break but if you can put on your running gear at night and go for a run or a bike ride in the morning it just turns a switch in your brain from work to exercise mode. It is a welcome break," Gavin said.

Gavin’s journey into triathlon started in a half IRONMAN distance as a team, with his very fit wife who ran and a friend who did the swim. It was just the inspiration he needed.

“We came pretty much last there and that is where I met people who were ordinary people doing something pretty extraordinary. I didn’t realise you could do such things once you got past a certain age, so then I did an Olympic distance triathlon in Kingston and I reckon I was second to last there. But I was pretty proud of myself for finishing it and it has gone from there. I went through the sprint distances, Tinmans and gradually built up and up. I thought if I can run a marathon, I will do an IRONMAN. So, the day after I ran my first marathon I signed up for IRONMAN Melbourne and that was 2012."

“Since then I have done an IRONMAN a year and did New Zealand in 2019. My PB days are behind me but I am picking destinations that I haven’t been to for holidays. My wife and I are running the Budapest half marathon in March as a destination race. It is more of a lifestyle holiday thing now. If I feel my fitness dropping off a bit, I will enter an event to get me motivated and on track again."

“I have adult children, one is a physiotherapist and the other is a dietician. When I tell the daughter who is a physiotherapist about a problem she says, ‘Toughen up a bit dad’. So there is not much sympathy there. My wife is very fit and she is working as a Phys Ed teacher and a very good runner and won her age group at Melbourne Marathon and Gold Coast Marathon. So, keeping healthy is in the family a bit and everyone is very supportive.”

“I haven’t done Geelong before because it normally clashes with a local race here but that is not on this year, so I am keen to do Geelong. It works out time wise and lots of friends are doing it and speak well of it. I believe it can be a tough race and a bit hot and windy depending on the year, but I am looking forward to the challenge of it,” Gavin said.

Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute IRONMAN 70.3 Geelong is proudly supported by the City of Greater Geelong and the Victorian Government.
For further information contact:

Noel McMahon - IRONMAN Media Manager (Oceania)
M: +61 455 091 476, P: +61 3 9249 7855, E: noel.mcmahon@ironman.com

Tracey Ellis - Head of Public Affairs Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute
M +61 433 781 972, P +61 3 8532 1514  E tracey.ellis@baker.edu.au

About Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute

Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute is an independent, internationally renowned medical research facility headquartered in Melbourne, Australia, The Institute has a strong, proud history spanning more than 92 years, with its work spanning the laboratory to wide-scale community studies. The Institute’s vision is for Australians to live healthier for longer, free from the burden of cardiovascular disease and diabetes. For more information about the Institute visit www.baker.edu.au. For information about the Baker Institute’s work in Sports Cardiology, visit https://baker.edu.au/research/laboratories/sports-cardiology

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